

## A Test of Seriousness

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BELIEVERS IN tough budget rules scored a big victory in the Senate last week -- temporarily, at least. By a 51 to 48 vote, senators agreed to revive the "pay as you go" rule, which helped bring the budget into balance during the 1990s. The rule, requiring that any tax cuts or increase in entitlement spending be paid for with spending cuts or tax increases, will be a major step -- *if* the majority that voted for the rule has enough spine to insist that it be retained in House-Senate conference.

But no sooner had the Senate voted than at least some of the lawmakers whose support was critical were waffling on whether they would insist that the rule be kept. With the administration and the Republican leadership dead set against a real "pay as you go" rule -- one that applies to tax cuts as well as spending increases -- the provision is at risk of being killed in conference. If such senators as Maine Republicans Olympia J. Snowe and Susan Collins believe, as they said with their votes last week, that a tough enforcement mechanism is key to getting the deficit under control, they should stick to that position and not cave to party pressure. The budget resolution passed the Senate with 51 votes. That's leverage when it comes back for a final vote -- and those who believe in "pay as you go" ought to have the courage to use it.

The picture in the House, where the budget committee is set to take up its own resolution today, isn't encouraging. House Budget Committee Chairman Jim Nussle (R-Iowa) unveiled last night the "Spending Control Act of 2004," which would apply "pay as you go" only to entitlement spending -- and permit the new spending to be offset only by spending cuts -- no tax increases allowed. Meanwhile, the House version of the budget resolution provides for an additional \$153 billion in tax cuts over the next five years. That's discipline? A group of moderate Republicans is to meet today to discuss the budget. They shouldn't support any budget that isn't accompanied by real enforcement rules.